From Germany to Iraq: The Forgotten Pogrom of Baghdad
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The brutal chapters of 20th-century history are filled with acts of politically motivated violence against Jews, but few are as distinct yet connected as Kristallnacht and the Farhud. While the former is widely recognised as a pivotal moment in the lead-up to the Holocaust, the latter is a lesser-known but equally tragic event that devastated the ancient Jewish community of Iraq. Despite being separated by over two and a half years and thousands of kilometres, a critical examination reveals how these two pogroms, driven by a shared ideological zeal, served as dual harbingers of unprecedented persecution and the end of vibrant Jewish diasporas in both Europe and the Middle East.

Kristallnacht, or the "Night of Broken Glass," represents the culmination of years of state-sponsored antisemitism in Nazi Germany. On 9-10 November 1938, in a meticulously orchestrated campaign disguised as a spontaneous popular uprising, Nazi stormtroopers, SS members, and Hitler Youth rampaged across the German Reich. Their targets were clear: Jewish synagogues, businesses, and homes. The violence was staggering—over 1,400 places of worship were set ablaze, countless properties were vandalised, and nearly 100 Jews were murdered. The climax of this terror was the mass arrest of 30,000 Jewish men who were sent to concentration camps like Dachau, Buchenwald, or Sachsenhausen. This act signalled the full-scale implementation of the Nazi regime's aims to eradicate Jews from Europe. The international community, while expressing outrage, took no action, a silence that tragically emboldened Hitler's regime to proceed with its "Final Solution."

Three years later, the Farhud, or the "Breakup of Order," unfolded in Baghdad, Iraq. Unlike Kristallnacht, the Farhud was not directly ordered by a totalitarian state but was a civilian pogrom that erupted on 1-2 June 1941, the beginning of the Jewish holiday of Shavuot. The impetus for the attacks was the British victory in the Anglo-Iraqi War that left a power vacuum after the government of Rashid Ali al-Gailani, a pro-fascist and pro-Nazi sympathiser. However, the intellectual seeds of the violence were sown by a familiar source: Nazi propaganda. The German embassy in Baghdad had systematically disseminated antisemitic literature, including Arabic translations of Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and incendiary radio broadcasts from Berlin. This propaganda fuelled a potent mix of Arab nationalism and anti-British sentiment, with Jews being scapegoated as a foreign, pro-British element. Mobs, including the paramilitary youth group *al-Futuwa*, attacked Jewish neighbourhoods with a ferocity reminiscent of the German pogrom. Hundreds of Jews were murdered, and their properties looted and destroyed, shattering the sense of security held by a community that had lived in Iraq for over 2,500 years.

The shared lineage of these two events is undeniable. Both were pogroms that employed similar tactics of mob violence, arson, and murder. They were not random acts of anger, but carefully cultivated eruptions of hatred enabled by a common ideological source—Nazi antisemitism—and the complicity of the authorities, who either directly participated or stood by. The use of youth groups in both countries is particularly chilling, as it demonstrates the long-term strategic indoctrination of a new generation to carry out acts of hatred.

The long-term consequences share many parallels. Kristallnacht was a point of no return for Germany's Jews, accelerating a desperate wave of emigration and pushing the Jewish community towards an unthinkable fate. The Farhud had a similar effect on Iraqi Jews. The violence proved that their ancient status as a protected minority was an illusion and made their continued existence in Iraq untenable. The pogrom triggered a mass exodus, and within a decade, a community that had contributed immeasurably to Iraqi culture and commerce for millennia was all but gone, with nearly all its members seeking refuge in the newly established state of Israel by the mid-1950s.

While the world remembers Kristallnacht as a prelude to the Holocaust, the Farhud stands as its forgotten counterpart, a testament to the global reach of a Nazi ideology and antisemitism. These events, while distinct, reveal a shared historical pattern: pogroms fuelled by a political and racial agenda that, once unleashed, irrevocably altered the course of history for Jews around the world. They serve as a powerful reminder that hate is not confined by geography or political borders, and in the 21st century, can spread with the click of a mouse.

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